Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 20 Number 3 March 2023

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, 12th March 2023, 6.30AM: Umamaheswaram. Meeting Point: Crescent Hospital, before PV Narasimha Rao Expressway, 5.00AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 99858-07186)

Umamaheswaram is located in the Nallamala Forest range around 150km from Hyderabad on Hyderabad-Srisailam highway, and is a section of the Eastern Ghats. Umamaheswaram forest range has a diverse range of flora and wildlife. It is a dry deciduous forest known for several medicinal plants. Many of the adventures of the popular wildlife writer, Kenneth Anderson are set in these forest ranges. Watch out for the Yellow-throated Bulbul (which is endemic to a few places in south India), Loten's Sunbird, Black Eagle, Spot-Bellied Eagle Owl, Indian Scops Owl, Asian Emerald Dove, Puff-throated Babbler, Jerdon's Nightjar, Grey-bellied Cuckoo etc. Also, watch out for winter migrants as the winter mornings for this season is almost over.

This will be longer than a half-day trip, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Strict Covid protocols will be followed, so please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Deccan Birders T-Shirts and caps will be available for sale.

FIELD TRIP-2: Sunday, 26th March 2023, 6.45AM: Mahavir Harina Vanasthali Deer Park. Meeting Point: Near Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 6.00AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sagarika Melkote (Mobile: 98480-39701)

The park is spread over 3000 acres and is a mix of dry deciduous and scrub forest. It also has a couple of small water bodies. It is said to be home to over 100 species of birds. Commonly seen species like Red-vented Bulbul, Sunbirds, Doves, Magpie and Indian Robins, Coppersmith Barbets, Black Kites, Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, Southern Coucal etc are easily spotted. We may also catch sight of some Black Buck and Mongoose, and maybe some reptiles too.

This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Strict Covid protocols will be followed, so please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Deccan Birders T-Shirts and caps will be available for sale.

HSBC Hyderabad Bird Race, February 26, 2023

This year's edition of the Bird Race was held with great success on February 26, 2023. A total of 18 teams, comprising 70 members, participated, and a total of more than 160 unique species were sighted during the day.

There was also a gathering in the evening, where team members submitted their logbooks, as well as shared their experiences and anecdotes from the day, and a great time was had by those present.

The top three teams were:

Team BLACKBIRDS (Abhinav Krishna, Lawrence Mathappan, Sanjeevani, Chitra Shanker) with 141 species;

Team FRANCOLINS (Prakash, Ramakrishna, Abhishek Ravindra, Mahendar Alpula) with 140 species; and

Team EAGLES (Naresh Vadrevu, Ramakanth, Nanditha, Kiran Kumar) with 114 species.

We bring you a report by Sanjeevani from Team Blackbirds, along with a number of colourful photographs.

Report: HSBC Hyderabad Bird Race, February 26, 2023

Sanjeevani Illambaruthi

At the Flag-off (Photo courtesy: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

The HSBC India Bird Race for Hyderabad was organized by Deccan Birders on February 26, 2023. It is an exciting event for birders new and old, through all ages. This was the first physical Bird Race after the pandemic, and was much awaited by many avid birders.

I could not sleep the previous night and kept checking my alarm. We got ready at 5:00AM and left home when it was still dark. All participants had to assemble before 6:00AM and register to make teams of 4-5 people with one team captain. Many people formed groups with others who were strangers, meeting for the first time with only one thing in common – love for birds.

After the flag off at 6:00AM, every team had till 5:00PM to bird all around the city of Hyderabad and make their entries in the booklet provided, after which the teams would assemble at the venue and wait for the judges to finish going through booklets of every team. Our team, named Blackbirds, consisted of young Abhinav, me, Chitra aunty, Lawrence Uncle and Srikanth Uncle. Our vehicle was a Thar jeep and we were seated at the back. Srikanth Uncle drove at literally breakneck speed (as fast as it was safe!) which is why we could reach many hotspots.

Brown-breasted Flycatcher (Photo: Sanjeevani Illambaruthi)

Large Cuckooshrike (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Indian Blue Robin (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

We started birding while driving and ticked off many of the common birds en route to our first destination – the Damagundam Reserve Forest. The highlights of this location were the sighting of the Indian Blue Robin, Malabar Whistling Thrush, Large Cuckooshrike, and Orange-headed Thrush, among many others.

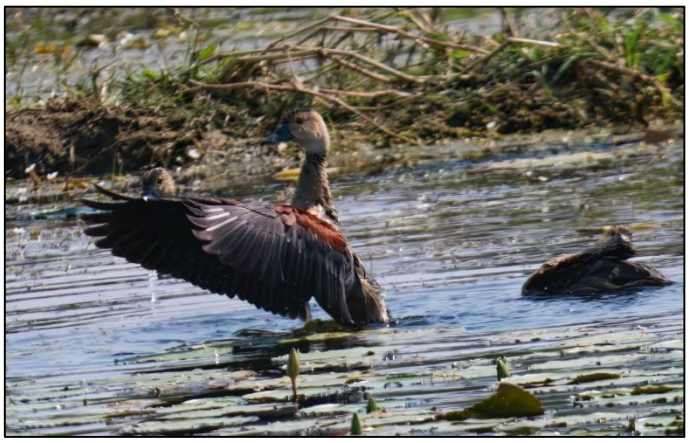
Indian Paradise-flycatcher (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

We did not stay for long here and moved towards Yenkathala grasslands in Vikarabad. On the way we saw the White-eyed Buzzard. Walking on the banks of the lake was a wonderful experience though we were disappointed with the lesser number of birds we saw.

Siberian Stonechat (Photo: Sanjeevani Illambaruthi)

By now it was getting really hot. We moved towards Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary, which was our main spot for water birds. While driving we saw a huge water body on the left and, on checking the map, came to know that it is the Pedda Cheruvu. We decided to offroad and drive around the lake which turned out to be the best decision. We saw so many terns and other water birds here. But photography was not easy as we were seated at the back and the birds were far away.

Our next stop was Manjeera Wildlife Sanctuary. We saw Fulvous Whistling-ducks, Cotton Pygmy-goose and Clamorous Reed Warblers calling loudly. It was past 2:00PM by then, and we stopped for lunch. After this we had to rush back due to paucity of time.



Fulvous Whistling-duck (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Clamorous Reed Warbler (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

During the closing event, all teams introduced themselves and talked about their experiences. It was very interesting to hear how the day went for the other teams. There were people from all ages and most teams had a mix of children and adults. The youngest member was two and a half years old, and the oldest above the age of 70!

We were told that there were 18 teams with 70 participants and that 160 unique species had been spotted on this single day, indicating the rich biodiversity we have around Hyderabad. We were getting apprehensive when our team was not called, but finally we were placed first with 141 species spotted, closely followed by Team Francolins with 140 and Team Eagles with 114. The Chief Guest, Mr A Sankaran, who is Officer on Special Duty with the Telangana Forest Department, also gave his thoughts on the wildlife and forest conservation in India.

That brought us to the end of a long tiring day, but left us happy, satisfied and grateful to have had this experience. I loved spending my day with nature. Our Bird of the Day was the Malabar Whistling Thrush, with its majestic violet plumage and melodious calls. To me, the Bird Race was more than just about birds – I also got to socialize with a lot of kids my age, and it is something I will look forward to each year.

The full list of birds seen is given below:

S. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	S. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Fulvous Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna bicolor*	53	White-eyed Buzzard	*Butastur teesa*
2	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	54	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*
3	Knob-billed Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*	55	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
4	Bar-headed Goose	*Anser indicus*	56	Brahminy Kite	*Haliastur indus*
5	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	57	Eurasian Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*
6	Cotton Pygmy-goose	*Nettapus coromandelianus*	58	Eurasian Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*
7	Green-winged Teal	*Anas crecca*	59	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*
8	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*	60	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
9	Gadwall	*Mareca strepera*	61	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*
10	Eurasian Wigeon	*Mareca penelope*	62	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
11	Common Pochard	*Aythya ferina*	63	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Monticola cinclorhyncha*
12	Northern Shoveler	*Spatula clypeata*	64	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
13	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	65	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
14	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	66	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psi1acula cyanocephala*
15	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	67	Large Cuckooshrike	*Coracina macei*
16	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	68	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*
17	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	69	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
18	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	70	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*
19	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	71	White-spotted Fantail	*Rhipidura albogularis*
20	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	72	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
21	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	73	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*
22	Green Sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	74	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*
23	Common Sandpiper	*Actitis hypoleucos*	75	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
24	Little Ringed Plover	*Charadrius dubius*	76	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
25	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	77	Indian Jungle Crow	*Corvus culminatus*
26	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	78	Rufous-tailed Lark	*Ammomanes phoenicura*
27	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	79	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*
28	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	80	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
29	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	81	White-browed Bulbul	*Pycnonotus luteolus*
30	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	82	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Cyornis rubeculoides*
31	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	83	Green Warbler	*Phyloscopus nitidus*
32	White-breasted Waterhen	*Amaurornis phoenicurus*	84	Paddyfield Warbler	*Acrocephalus agricola*
33	Black-winged Stilt	*Himantopus himantopus*	85	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*
34	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	86	Booted Warbler	*Iduna caligata*
35	Yellow-wattled lapwing	*Vanellus malabaricus*	87	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
36	Little Tern	*Sternula albifrons*	88	Large Grey Babbler	*Argya malcolmi*
37	Whiskered Tern	*Chlidonias hybrida*	89	Jungle Babbler	*Turdoides striata*
38	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	90	Yellow-billed Babbler	*Turdoides affinis*
39	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	91	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
40	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	92	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
41	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	93	Asian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
42	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	94	Orange-headed Thrush	*Zoothera citrina*
43	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	95	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*
44	Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*	96	Brown-breasted Flycatcher	*Muscicapa muttui*
45	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*	97	Asian Brown Flycatcher	*Muscicapa dauurica*
46	Cattle Egret	*Bubulcus ibis*	98	Verditer Flycatcher	*Eumyias thalassinus*
47	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	99	Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
48	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	100	Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher	*Merops philippinus*
49	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	101	Indian Robin	*Saxicoloides fulicatus*
50	Red-naped Ibis	*Pseudibis papillosa*	102	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
51	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	103	Indian Blue Robin	*Luscinia brunnea*
52	Black Kite	*Milvus migrans*	104	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*

S. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	S. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
105	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	125	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
106	Malabar Whistling Thrush	*Myophonus horsfieldii*	126	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
107	Blue-capped Rock Thrush	*Monticola cinclorhynchus*	127	Wire-tailed Swallow	*Hirundo smithii*
108	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*	128	Dusky Crag Martin	*Ptyonoprogne concolor*
109	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*	129	Ashy Woodswallow	*Artamus fuscus*
110	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*	130	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
111	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*	131	White-browed Wagtail	*Motacilla maderaspatensis*
112	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*	132	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
113	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*	133	Ashy-crowned Sparrowlark	*Eremopterix griseus*
114	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*	134	Indian Bushlark	*Mirafra erythroptera*
115	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*	135	Indian Golden Oriole	*Oriolus kundoo*
116	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*	136	Grey Francolin	*Francolinus pondicerianus*
117	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*	137	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*
118	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	138	Little Stint	*Calidris minuta*
119	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	139	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*
120	Jungle Prinia	*Prinia sylvatica*	140	Common Greenshank	*Tringa nebularia*
121	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*	141	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
122	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	142	Temminck's Stint	*Calidris temminckii*
123	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	143	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*
124	Asian Palm Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*			

At the evening get-together (Photo courtesy: Gokul Krishna Addanki)

Our Bird of the Day: Malabar Whistling Thrush
(Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

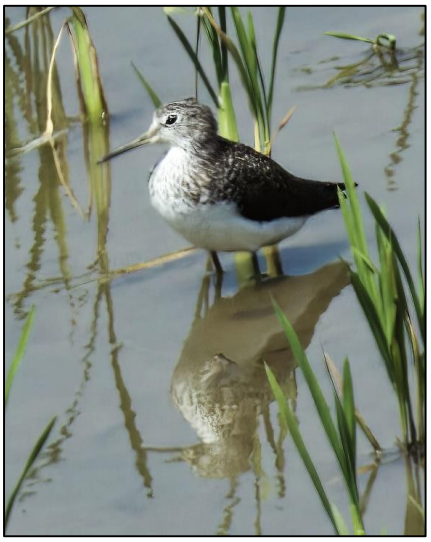
Some other photos taken during the day:

Oriental Magpie Robin (Photo: Sanjeevani Illambaruthi)

Baya Weaver (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Brown Shrike
(Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Coppersmith Barbet
(Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)



Green Sandpiper
(Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

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Report: Our Experience at the 1st Bird Survey, Melghat Tiger Reserve, January 26-29, 2023

Text & Photos: Vijaya & Dhiraj Kaveri

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon

Melghat Tiger Reserve is situated in the Satpuda Hill ranges of central India and is rich in biodiversity. Established in 1973, it is one of the first tiger reserves of India, and is also well-known for the presence of the Forest Owlet.

This was the second official bird survey that we were participating in. Being amateur birders, we were very excited and ensured we had the right gear to participate. A few members of Deccan Birders helped us choose the right binoculars and camera.

Crested Serpent Eagle

The inaugural event was conducted at Shahanur Gate, after which we were assigned different camp sites in groups of two. Our survey point was Dhargad Rest House. Dinesh, a forest official, and Mahadeo, a forest staff, were very cooperative and supportive throughout the survey.

During the surveys, we covered different habitats like grasslands, meadows, deep forests and the Wan River. We got a chance to observe birds in their most natural environment.

Forest Owlet

By the end of 3 days, we had recorded around 55 bird species. Many of them were Lifers for us!

Stork-billed Kingfisher

Some of our favourite finds were:

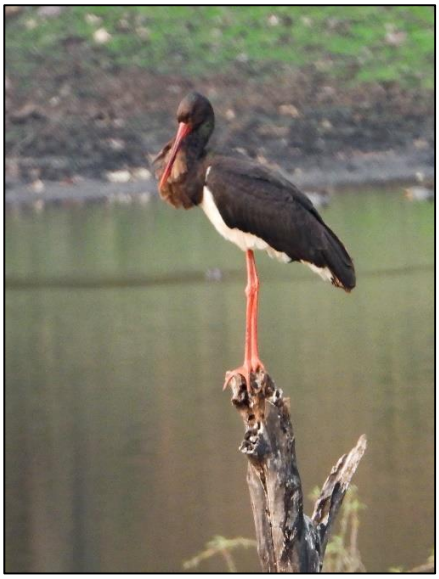
Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Forest Owlet	*Athene blewitti*	10	Siberian Stonechat	*Saxicola maurus*
2	Crested Serpent Eagle	*Spilornis cheela*	11	Ashy Drongo	*Dicrurus leucophaeus*
3	Black Stork	*Ciconia nigra*	12	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
4	Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	13	Stork-billed Kingfisher	*Pelargopsis capensis*
5	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	14	Grey Wagtail	*Motacilla cinerea*
6	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*	15	Black-rumped Flameback	*Dinopium benghalense*
7	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicoptera*	16	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*
8	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*	17	Indian Roller	*Coracias benghalensis*
9	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	*Terpsiphone paradisi*			

MTR is home to over three hundred bird species, of which some are critically endangered, like the Forest Owlet. Obviously this bird was the star attraction of the trip! We were lucky enough to spot this bird on all our daily walks.

We also encountered some wild mammals like the Leopard, Indian Gaur and Sloth Bear, and this added to the fear and thrill which Melghat is famous for. No wonder it is called ‘Magical Melghat’.

As nature lovers we feel that observing birds is a means to understanding the ecosystem and the symbiotic relation we, as humans, share with Nature, and how our actions can have an effect on other living beings. The memory of this trip will remain with us for a long time till we visit MTR again.

Some other photos taken during the trip:

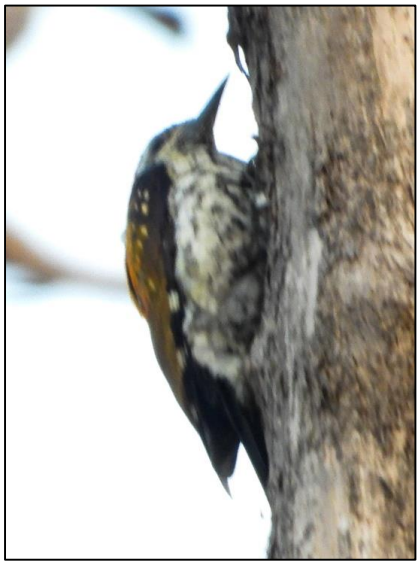


Black Stork

Indian Paradise-flycatcher

Indian Grey Hornbill

Rufous Treepie



Black-rumped Flameback

Indian Roller

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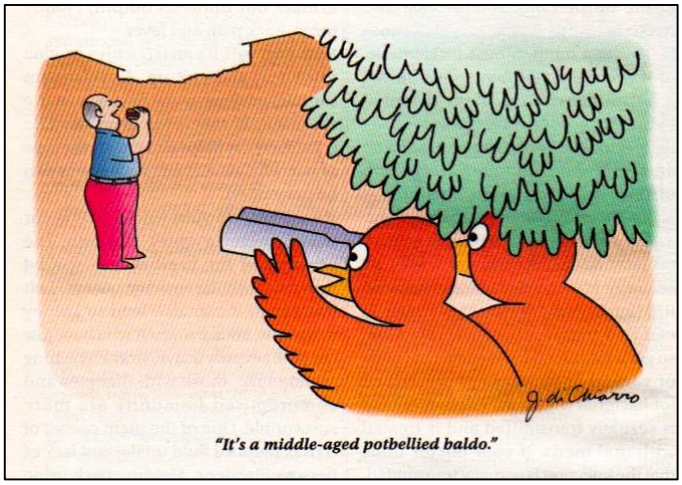
Bird Humour

Contributed by Shafaat Ulla



(From Reader's Digest, March 2017)

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*)

Long-toed Stint (Chennai, October 28, 2020)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Scolopacidae
Genus: *Calidris*
Species: *C. subminuta*
Size: 13-15 cm

Description & distribution: The Long-toed Stint is a small-sized wader that breeds in the northern regions of Asia, and winters in South and South-east Asia (including Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Maldives), and in New Guinea and Australia. It is also a very rare vagrant to Sweden, South Africa, Hawaii and northwestern America. Like the other 3 Stints seen in India, the Long-toed Stint belongs to the genus *Calidris*, which gets its name from the Ancient Greek *kalidris* (or *skalidris*), a term used by Aristotle to describe some grey waterside birds.

It has white underparts, with the breast being speckled with brown. Upperparts are mottled dark brown, greyish-brown or dusky, with darker feather centres, and it has a brownish crown with a distinct supercilium. The head is small, with a short, straight, pointed blackish bill; the base of the lower mandible is yellow or pale brown. Legs are greenish or yellowish – a feature it shares only with the Temminck's Stint in India. In non-breeding season, the upperparts become more greyish rather than brownish. Neck is slender, and the long legs are set well back on a rounded belly. The toes are long and slender – especially the middle toe. In flight, the long toes project slightly beyond the tail, unlike other stints. Juvenile birds, like the breeding adults, show rufous fringes to upperparts and whitish mantle stripes, but have finer streaking on breast.

Habitat & behaviour: The Long-toed Stint is usually seen singly or in small numbers, usually along with other small waders like stints, sand plovers, ringed plovers, sandpipers etc. It frequents a variety of wetland habitats like fields, flooded meadows, freshwater or brackish water areas, lake edges, floodplains, sewage ponds, lagoons, tidal creeks, estuaries, marshes, intertidal mudflats and salt pans. The Long-toed Stint forages by probing the wet mud with its bill, looking for prey that primarily consists of aquatic insects, amphibians, crustaceans, mollusks and other invertebrates; it also picks up seeds. Its usual calls are a quiet *prrrrp*, similar to the Curlew Sandpiper, uttered in flight, or a soft, rippling *brrt-chrrup* or *chulip*, and a sharp *tik-tik-tik*. The song is a slow *kroer*, usually repeated.

Nesting: The Long-toed Stint breeds generally between June and July in most of its breeding range in Northern Europe and Siberia. The typical nest is usually a well-hidden, shallow depression on a mound of sedge or dried grass, in areas with sedge, moss and willows. The usual clutch consists of 3-4 (sometimes 5) cryptically coloured eggs.

Local name: The Long-toed Stint is known as *'Pachai kaal kosu ullan'* in Tamil.

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